

7-1-82

WASHINGTON  
OIL & GAS 4024-0018  
EXP. 10/31/81

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

1. Name

historic Fort Dearborn Hotel

and/or common none

2. Location

street & number 401 South LaSalle

N/A not for publication

city, town Chicago

N/A vicinity of

congressional district

state Illinois

code

012

county Cook

code

031

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: hotel

4. Owner of Property

name 401 S. LaSalle Venture

street & number 1936 N. Clark Street

city, town Chicago

N/A vicinity of

state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cook County Recorder and Registrar of Titles

street & number 118 N. Clark Street

city, town Chicago

state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title none

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date N/A

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A

state N/A

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

### Check one

unaltered

altered

### Check one

original site

moved

date N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Fort Dearborn Hotel is located on a 100-foot-square site at the southeast corner of LaSalle and Van Buren Streets in Chicago. It was designed by the firm of Holabird & Roche, with Edward A. Renwick heading the project team and Henry J. Burt as structural engineer.

The building is 17 stories high and has two basements. Its steel skeleton frame (steel columns, spandrels and girders) rests on caisson foundations. Of "fireproof construction," the Fort Dearborn Hotel has a combination of reinforced concrete and hollow tile ribbed floor and roof arches. Fireproof clay tile partitions of 3" hollow tile are plastered on both sides.

In plan, the structure is U-shaped with a light court above the third floor that opens to the south. The walls facing this court are of light gray facing brick with gray terra cotta sills, lintels and trim.

The hotel was completed in March, 1914, with a record-breaking construction time of 9 months 12 days, including demolition of the Memory Building, which previously occupied the site. Cost of the 500-room hotel was estimated at \$1.2 million.

The edifice was designed in the eclectic style typical of the classically-inspired skyscrapers of that period. Overall, the decorative detailing evoked the spirit of the Venetian Renaissance. The first two stories of the hotel's north and west frontages were sheathed in light gray terra cotta to imitate a continuous granite base found below the ground floor shop windows. From this base, two-story-high terra cotta pilasters set at the column line are crowned by composite order capitals that support a decorative fluted frieze punctuated regularly by medallions. A string of dentils just above this served as a modified wall cornice that marks the boundary between terra cotta and brick. A richly decorated terra cotta string course above the smaller windows of the third floor "attic" completed the gesture to neoclassical form.

The rest of the building's north and west facades are sheathed in reddish brown impervious facing brick laid in gray mortar. The Venetian Renaissance theme was further expressed by ornamental iron balconies gracing the odd-numbered floors (5 through 13). These balconies (since removed) spanned the central four windows and the two sets of double windows at the corners of each of these floors. All room windows are double-hung and have wood frames and terra cotta lintels and sills (except for the second floor's, which feature fluted terra cotta mullions). At the 15th-floor sill line, a wide terra cotta band course was punctuated by matching balconets at each window; ornamental cartouche tablets visually joined the windows of the 15th and 16th floors. Finally, a guilloched string course accentuated the 17th (attic) floor, which was crowned by a terra cotta cornice complete with monumental balustrade and urns.

FOR CONTINUATION SEE SHEETS 1 AND 2.

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At the street level, the hotel only had one entrance (other than freight), which faced west on LaSalle Street and was accented by an ornamental iron electric canopy. Small-paned windows, glazed with obscure leaded glass, filled the remaining four bays of the building's ground-floor west facade and one bay of the north facade (at the northwest corner where an entrance to the hotel bar was tucked behind the corner column and marked by a small ornamental iron portal). Four north-facing storefront bays completed the ground floor fenestration, which was crowned by an elaborate terra cotta frieze along the spandrel beams.

Over the years, the first floor facade was completely remodeled and all terra cotta details above the third floor were removed, including the cornice and balustrade.

Inside the hotel entrance on the right an ornamental cast iron staircase -- with a gold balustrade, mahogany railing and marble treads, risers and platforms-- connected the basement to the third floor. Opposite this staircase were the hotel's three passenger elevators. This area opened into the main lobby, which was finished in dark mahogany relieved by panel work of reddish Rookwood tile. The center portion of the lobby was two stories (25 feet) high and was decorated with gold-leafed plaster crown moldings, attributed by a contemporary writer to the "Adam period."

The lobby's original ceiling had false beams of plaster and the central raised ceiling was covered in gold leaf. The original flooring was marble set in black and white checkerboard pattern. Alabastine chandeliers and sconces provided "indirect" illumination in the lobby and its adjoining lounge, located in the southwest corner.

On the east wall of the lobby, two 8 x 17-foot murals were painted by artist Edgar Cameron. Entitled "Scene Near Fort Dearborn" and "Bartering With Indians at Fort Dearborn", they served not only as decoration but also as reinforcement of the hotel's name and theme.

The lounge area was finished in Elizabethan style with walls of carved oak and a mantel at the south end "as would grace an old-English baronial hall." All these features are still extant. The small-paned windows "medallioned in cathedral glass" have been removed, and a lowered ceiling covers the carved wood original.

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The hotel had a bar (with and independent entrance) and four different places to eat--a deli and lunch room on the main floor (with storefront and lobby entrances), a basement grill and the hotel's main dining room on the second or mezzanine floor.

This mezzanine floor featured a promenade overlooking the main lobby (separated by a wrought iron and mahogany rail matching that of the main staircase). Also found on this floor were a writing room, a ladies' retiring room, a broker's office and two sample rooms. Ancillary facilities--kitchen, barbershop, laundry and storage--were located in the basement, which extended under the sidewalk. The partial sub-basement was used as a power plant for a two-pipe vacuum return heating system.

The remaining fifteen floors were given over to 500 hotel rooms, all equipped with toilets and lavatories; 250 with baths. Floors were laid out so that all hotel rooms had direct access to natural light and ventilation, facing either the streets or the light court.

The present owners of the building plan to restore the exterior to its original appearance as much as is financially feasible using original working drawings and contemporary photographs. They plan to change the building's use to offices, adding an elevator and stair core in the south end of the interior light court, which will be converted to an atrium by the addition of a skylight at the roof level.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1914

Builder/Architect EDWARD RENWICK/HOLABIRD & ROCHE

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Fort Dearborn Hotel was built at a special period in America's history-- a boom time when the latest developments in trade, technology and transportation came together in the nation's cities. And Chicago was by far the best example of this. In the years from 1890 to 1914, the city's population more than doubled, to two million people. Thirty-four railroads converged at Chicago, making it the rail center of the country. Daring clients and brilliant, innovative designers collaborated to project Chicago into national prominence as an architectural capital. The wealth of the fertile prairies poured into the city, which became a magnet for thousands of people who believed that fortunes could be made, not only by the great, but by the not-so-great as well.

Chicago's hotel industry was taking advantage of this massive influx. There was no paucity of hotels in the south Loop around 1912. For the upper-class tourist or the well-to-do executive there were palatial quarters with every service imaginable in hotels such as the Grand Pacific (a 600-room behemoth at Jackson and LaSalle) or the ever-opulent Palmer House. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of older, smaller (6-8 story) hotels such as McCoy's, Hotel Grace, or the old Kaiserhof, were called "popular" hotels whose clientele (mostly male) traveled on a shoestring.

The Fort Dearborn Hotel was of a cut made between these two extremes, an establishment whose clientele were serious businessmen with specialized needs. They wanted an image that was modern, functional and tasteful enough to impress potential customers, yet without the "frills" that would make prices prohibitive.

No one architectural firm was better equipped to design the cost-effective fulfillment of these needs than Holabird & Roche. Their reputation in the field was established, as indicated by a "Hotel Monthly" trade magazine article: "Holabird & Roche have specialized hotels and are responsible for many of the best hotel creations in recent years." As such, they knew the ingredients for success.

The first was the site. Here the architect also acted as the developer, and Edward A. Renwick, a principal in the firm, was recorded as acquiring the property in 1912.\* The Van Buren Street location was on an ideal tangent between transportation and commerce: It was across the street from the LaSalle Street Station, where the Rock Island, Lake Shore & Michigan and Nickel Plate Road brought in more than 200 trains a day, including the famous Twentieth Century Limited. With Grand Central Station two blocks away and the Loop Elevated station just steps from the hotel entrance, the ads for the

(footnote) \*Although it is unclear as to whether the architects actually invested in the building or simply received shares in lieu of a fee, according to John Holabird, William Holabird retained part ownership in the venture for some time. The most notable recent managers have been the Pritzker family, founders of the Hyatt Hotel chain, who managed the hotel from 1934 through 1974, acquiring ownership in 1968.

FOR CONTINUATION SEE SHEETS 3, 4 AND 5.

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Fort Dearborn could boast that it was the "only hotel in Chicago with direct transportation at its doors to all parts of the city." And surrounding the hotel site was the city's wholesale garment and textile district. For those on government business, the U.S. Customs House was a short walk away, as were the financial interests of LaSalle Street.

With the site chosen, the next step was to design a no-frills commercial hotel that would be attractive but affordable, offering "maximum comfort at the lowest cost" (as the ads would later claim). In many ways, the Fort Dearborn would be patterned after the Hotel Sherman, also designed by the same firm and completed just a year before the Fort Dearborn project began.

Like the Hotel Sherman, the Fort Dearborn would be of fireproof construction and have an interior light court. It would also follow the Sherman model in its mezzanine floor with writing rooms and a promenade that would have a view of the lobby below. New innovations in plumbing technology would allow a lavatory and a tap with ice water in every room--affordable luxuries that this business hotel would have in common with its more exclusive predecessor. The architects also would ensure the installation of a ventilation system so modern and thorough that it provided a "complete air change so often that the Fort Dearborn Hotel should have the name of 'the pure house,'" in the words of a contemporary reviewer.

Unlike the Hotel Sherman, however, the "space used for entertaining features has been reduced to a minimum." No ballroom or ladies' cafe graced the Fort Dearborn Hotel. Instead of the Hotel Sherman's sixty "sample rooms" used for salesmen exhibiting their wares, the Fort Dearborn only had two, and only one store to compare with Sherman's fourteen.

But then, they really were two completely different types of hotels. In terms of private rooms, Hotel Sherman was only a third bigger (757 rooms), but its total cost was nearly twice that of the Fort Dearborn (\$2.5 million). And these differences also were reflected in the buildings' styles: The Hotel Sherman's lavishly appointed French Renaissance bespoke great culture, even royalty, while the Venetian Renaissance of the Fort Dearborn Hotel proclaimed its more practical allegiance to commerce.

Even the art chosen for the interior alluded to this difference in class: The renowned artist Maxfield Parrish was commissioned to paint a mural in the Hotel Sherman's Celtic Bar in hopes that it would make that bar just as famous as Parrish's other mural did for the Hotel Knickerbocker in New York City. The lobby murals in the Fort Dearborn were painted by a local artist, Edgar S. Cameron, who though not nationally known, was somewhat of a local celebrity. Cameron studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and served as the art critic for the Chicago Tribune. As a young artist, he had also helped to produce a huge, 100-ft., diameter "cyclorama" of the Chicago Fire.

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The Hotel Sherman Co. was operated by Joseph Beifeld, who was its president. His sons Ernest and Eugene were officers of the company, and Frank Bering was its general manager. (Ernest Beifeld later achieved prominence as the flamboyant manager of the Ambassador Hotels.) Together, these gentlemen were credited as being the "geniuses responsible for the Fort Dearborn." Undoubtedly they had a hand in the changes that the hotel's design underwent during 1913, changes that were basically improvements in the amenities the Fort Dearborn would offer:

The second-floor meeting room was expanded and made into the hotel's dining room. Though there was no provision for a ballroom, a resilient floor was installed in this dining room to provide the opportunity to convert the room's usage should the situation warrant it.

A restaurant originally planned for the northeast corner of the ground floor was removed and redivided into a shop and a lunchroom. This lunchroom could be entered from both Van Buren Steet and the lobby. It afforded "quick service of hotel prepared foods at popular prices;" in modern terms, it was a cafeteria--the city's second--modeled after its successful predecessor in the Hotel Sherman. Next door, a delicatessen was added to offer yet another restaurant option.

The basement grill was enlarged and rearranged so as to be accessible by stairs from the bar above. The basement barbershop was enlarged, and the kitchen was reduced in size.\*

Thus, the Beifelds "dressed up" the bare bones of the Fort Dearborn Hotel to give it a pride and dignity that could be associated with success. Undoubtedly, they were able to afford the above improvements because the Fort Dearborn's operational relationship with the Hotel Sherman was almost symbiotic: They shared managers, caterer, and chef. In fact, the heads of the Fort Dearborn's various departments were trained at Hotel Sherman. Obviously, these cost-cutting measures enabled the Fort Dearborn to earn the following accolade: "The distinction of Chicago's newest hotel is the combination of room and restaurant accomocations of the highest standard with the lowest possible charges." The low room rates were considered "out of the ordinary," with \$2.50 being the highest single room fee ( as compared with the Hotel Sherman's of \$4.00, or up to \$15 for suites).

(footnote) \*It is interesting to note that the plans of the hotel published in a 1931 textbook written by H.J. Burt, the building's structural engineer ( Steel Construction ) ignored these changes and were published unrevised.

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With all that it offered at those prices, it is easy to understand how the Fort Dearborn set a new standard for the "popular, commercial" hotel. Other hotels of the same genre sprang up around the city, but the Fort Dearborn is the last of its kind in the South Loop. As an innovative design jointly produced by two of the city's top architectural and hotel firms of the day, the Fort Dearborn Hotel stands as a symbol of transportation, trade and technology meeting at the start of this century, and as such is worthy of landmark status.



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1

History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago,  
Frank A. Randall, Urbana, 1949.

Century of Progress: Guide to Chicago, anon., Chicago, 1933.

Hotel Monthly, Chicago, February 1911.

Hotel Monthly, Chicago, April 1914.

Steel Construction, H.J. Burt, Chicago, 1931.

The Graphic, Chicago, December 19, 1891.

A Little Journey to Hotel Sherman, Elbert Hubbard, East Aurora, New York, 1911.

Brochure: "Hotels", Holabird and Roche, Chicago, 1912.

Catalog: "Exhibition of Paintings of Edgar S. Cameron and Marie Gelon Cameron  
of Chicago", Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, 1909.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet number Six.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property .23 acres

Quadrangle scale 1 : 24000

Quadrangle name Chicago Loop Quadrangle

UMT References

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

**Verbal boundary description and justification**  
Lots 2 and 5 and the North 1.0 feet of Lot 8 in Block 114 in School Section Addition to Chicago in Section 16, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	Illinois	code	county	Cook	code
state		code	county		code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Judith Kiriazis / Consultant

organization Booth/Hansen & Associates, Ltd. date 7:1:82

street & number 555 South Dearborn Street telephone 312-281-4332

city or town Chicago state Illinois

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

title \_\_\_\_\_

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

date \_\_\_\_\_

Attest:

Chief of Registration